

EMPIRICAL STUDY ON INFLUENCE OF EXTRAVERSION ON CONSUMER PASSION AND BRAND EVANGELISM WITH WORD-OF-MOUTH COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: *Word-of-Mouth (WOM) is recognized as a powerful marketing instrument. Its importance as a communication mechanism has widely explored and established in influencing purchase decision in the consumer behaviour domain (e.g., Gilly et al. 1998; Herr et al. 1991; Wilson 1991). WOM was recognized as an important determinant of consumer's buying behaviour early in marketing literature (Butler 1923), its influence reported as greater than personal selling and advertising (Engel et al. 1969; Feldman and Spencer 1965; Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955) and findings show that more extravert consumers are more likely to be passionate consumers and engage in brand evangelism. For decades, it has received extensive attention from both academicians and practitioners, who demonstrated that WOM communications could not only influence consumers' purchase decisions (Arndt 1967b; Whyte 1954), but also shape consumers' expectations (Zeithaml and Bitner 1996), pre-usage attitudes (Herr et al. 1991), and even post-usage perceptions of a product or service (Bone 1995; Burzynski and Bayer 1977). Researchers have documented the existence of certain types of consumers, opinion leaders and market mavens, who have a personal predisposition to disseminate WOM to fellow consumers (Feick and Price 1987; Lazarsfeld et al. 1944) in an influencing manner. This paper is an attempt to figure out the inter relationship of positive influence of extraversion on consumer passion and ultimately on brand evangelism as a marketing phenomenon in Indian context.*

Keywords: *Word-of-Mouth, Influence, Extraversion, Consumer Passion, Brand Evangelism.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Consumers seek the opinions of other individuals for product advice when they have little expertise in a product category (Gilly et al. 1998; Furse et al. 1984), perceive a high risk in decision-making (Bansal and Voyer 2000; Kiel and Layton 1981), or are deeply involved in the purchase decision (Beatty and Smith 1987). Concerning the question why certain personal sources of information have more influence than others to identify general market-place influencers and use them for more effective product and message diffusion, factors such as source expertise (Bansal and Voyer 2000; Gilly et al. 1998), tie strength (Brown and Reingen 1987; Frenzen and Nakamoto 1993), demographic similarity (Brown and Reingen 1987), reference group influence (Bearden and Etzel 1982) and perceptual affinity (Gilly et al. 1998) have been identified as important antecedents of WOM influence. Consumer behaviour literature provides ample evidence of enthusiastic and highly passionate forms of consumer-object relationships. Wallendorf and Arnould (1988) contended that material objects play many important roles in the lives of consumers which sometime become "favourite things" and serve important psychological functions in private lives. In particular, they situate an individual's character or personality in a context (Goffman 1959; Levy 1959; Mick 1986), thus serve as markers for others to denote personality. We also use objects to convey and extend our self-concept, as a sign of connection or differentiation from other members of society. Favourite or love objects (Wallendorf and Arnould 1988; Ahuvia 2005) reflect deep personal meaning and attachment. As such they are means for self-expression and are often accompanied by highly affective states. It has also been contended that enthusiastic consumers are spreading positive word-of-mouth and engage in convincing other consumers (Ahuvia 2006; Pimentel and Reynolds 2004) and they are subtle brand evangelists. Yet, having observed these enthusiastic consumers, we suggest that word-of-mouth as a measurement construct is likely to underestimate the evangelical forms of talking about favourite possessions and the tendency of passionate consumers to convince other consumers. Still, we are aware that not all consumers, not even all brand passionate consumers do try to evangelize others. Building on psychological theory about passion, we try to find out which passionate consumers have an inclination towards evangelism. Baumeister and Bratslavsky (1999) stated that personality has a strong influence on how passionate a person is. Especially extraversion was found to be "particularly associated with passionate aspects of love [. . .] thus, the evidence points to a view of extraversion as more passionate" (pp. 57-58). Therefore, we will look at the influence of extraversion as one personality trait, and of openness as a possible second influencing trait on passion. This article intends to shed light on the relationship between consumers' personality and its impact on consumer passion and the propensity to evangelize. To this end we will first elaborate consumer passion as a psychological construct, as well as evangelism and personality from a theoretical

standpoint. A study among enthusiastic consumers of apparels who has gone through with more than three purchases in a row in two retail outlets of Levi's in Jaipur and Delhi both are in India has been conducted to test our hypotheses to empirically prove these aspects.

1.1 Consumer Passion

In the context of consumption, consumer passion has recently been noticed (Shimp and Madden 1988; Belk et al. 2003), particularly in an interpretive research context. Here, passionate feelings are not directed towards another person as in the case of interpersonal love relationships, but towards a product or a service or a brand. Still, many aspects are very similar and therefore justify the use of the same term. Fournier's (1998) concept of consumer-brand-relationships contains passion as one relevant factor for determining the brand relationship quality disposition. Accordingly, if a consumer is passionate about a brand, he/she will engage in a much more emotional relationship with the brand and even miss the brand or feel loss when the brand is unavailable. Belk, Ger, and Askegaard (2003) show how passion in the form of desire inspires and motivates a big part of contemporary consumption. They also find evidence for the assumption that passion leads to certain behaviours and show that idealization of the object is an immediate consequence of passion. Analogously to passion between two persons, passion for a brand also leads to certain behaviours. The positive, biased perception of the brand's qualities as a partner in a consumer-brand-relationship was detected by Fournier (1998). She also states that the affective grounding of a consumer-brand relationship might account significantly for the loyalty of consumers to their brands. Whang et al. (2004) confirm the relationship between passion and loyalty as follows: "Only the passion component of interpersonal love had an impact on loyalty to their bikes." Ahuvia (2005b) has worked on a conceptualization of brand love which does not only comprise passion for the brand, but also the positive evaluation of the brand, positive emotions towards the brand and declarations of love for the brand extrovertly. In a next step, Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) have tested the relationship between brand love and loyalty as well as between brand love and positive word-of-mouth as possible outcomes of brand love. They have found positive effects of brand love on both behavioural parameters.

1.2 Brand Evangelism

Still, there are hints in theory as well as in real-life that passion for a brand can cause more intense and more extreme acts than just positive word-of-mouth. Pimentel and Reynolds (2004) have shown that truly devoted consumers not only spread positive word-of-mouth but eventually engage in recruiting in order to actively convince others of their beloved brand of any commodity. Rozanski, Baum, and Wolfsen (1999) portray the actions of brand zealots whose extreme loyalty and emotionality towards their favourite brand can inspire them to extreme acts. Based on this evidence, we propose the term

brand evangelism for describing a more active and committed way of spreading positive opinions and trying fervently to convince or persuade others to get engaged with the same brand. By having chosen the word evangelism we would like to emphasize the missionary component of this behavioural outcome of consumer passion. We assume that brand evangelism is an act of preaching the brand's most loved aspects and all positive associations that come with it to people who have so far not acknowledged "the wonder of it." Consumers who evangelize are passionate about their brand and feel the need to share their emotions with others. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H₁: Brand passion is positively related to brand evangelism.

1.3 Role of Extraversion & Openness

After decades of disparate theories and equivocal findings, in the last twenty years consensus has emerged that the most salient aspects of an individual's personality can be described with a five-factor model (Big Five) consisting of Neuroticism, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Openness, and Conscientiousness (Goldberg 1993). These five domains have been identified in numerous empirical studies (Tupes and Christal 1992) constituting the pattern of traits across individuals and are considered the fundamental dimensions of personality (McCrae and John 1992). Numerous researchers from many traditions were able to replicate the findings, thereby sustaining the theory of five basic dimensions of personality. This structure was found across observers (e.g., self- and peer-reports), across methodologies (questionnaires and lexical inventories), across the lifespan, across languages and cultures (John and Srivastava 1999; Saucier and Ostendorf 1999; McCrae 2004). This emerging consensus has led to a revitalization of personality scholarship (Funder 2001). In marketing research, personality traits have been adopted to study a variety of behaviors and emotional responses, such as emotions and customer satisfaction (e.g., Mooradian and Olver 1997; e.g., Matzler et al. 2005), reliance on word-of-mouth (Mooradian and Swan 2006), hedonic and utilitarian shopping values (Guido 2006), and ad-evoked feelings (e.g., Mooradian 1996). In this study, the focus is on two personality traits that are expected to be positively related to brand passion and brand evangelism: Extraversion and Openness to experience. Extraversion is distinguished by venturesomeness, affiliation, positive affectivity, energy, ascendance, and ambition. In psychology, a number of studies have aimed at correlating personality traits with affective states (e.g., Larsen and Katelaar 1991; Rusting and Larsen 1997). It was found that individuals who score high on extraversion are predisposed toward positive affect and prefer interpersonal interaction (Mooradian and Swan 2006). Extraversion was found to be positively correlated to positive emotions in many studies (Costa and McCrae 1980; Watson and Clark 1992). In a marketing context, some studies related extraversion to positive emotions in consumption situations (Mooradian and Olver 1997; Matzler et al. 2005). Guido (2006) found that extraversion is positively related to hedonic shopping values and

purchase intentions. Moreover, as reported above, Baumeister and Bratslavsky (1999) contended that personality has a strong influence on how much passionate a person is in his/her life. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H₂: Extraversion is positively related to brand passion.

Openness to experience (which often has been labelled as intellect) is related to active imagination, aesthetic sensitivity, and attentiveness to inner feelings, preference for variety, intellectual curiosity, and independence of judgment (Costa and McCrae 1992). Individuals with high scores on openness to experience have been described as being more curious about both inner and outer worlds. Open individuals are also more willing to entertain novel ideas and unconventional values, and they experience both positive and negative emotions more keenly than do closed individuals (Costa and McCrae 1992). Highly open people display intellectual curiosity/wit, creativity, flexible thinking, and culture (Dingman 1990). The facets of openness are related to fantasy, aesthetics, feelings, actions, ideas, and values.

Due to the higher tendency of open individuals to be curious about both inner and outer worlds, to have experientially richer lives, to experience both negative and positive emotions more keenly than closed individuals, it can be assumed that they develop stronger passion for brands than people who score low on openness to experience. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H₃: Openness to experience is positively related to brand passion.

However, due to the more intellectual character of open personalities and their tendency to value independence of judgment (Costa and McCrae 1992), they might be much less prone to evangelize, but rather engage in behaviour that is more aesthetic and creative in nature. In contrast to this, individuals with high scores on extraversion have been characterized as assertive, forceful and socially ascendant, speaking without hesitation. Furthermore, extraverts are cheerful and optimistic individuals hence have a tendency to experience more positive emotions. Low scores, on the other hand, prefer to keep in the background and tend to let others do the talking (Costa and McCrae 1992). Hence, I assume a slight positive direct relationship between extraversion and evangelism as a special form of positive social talk. Therefore it is hypothesized that:

H₄: Extraversion is positively related to brand evangelism.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Samples & Measures

Data collection took place in Jaipur and Delhi basically in various exclusive outlets of apparel brand called Levi's. A self-administered questionnaire was developed and respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire by the P.G.D.M students of

Jaipuria Institute of Management, Jaipur as a part of their credit course in sixth trimester. Two hundred sixty four usable questionnaires were collected. Missing data (less than 10%) have been imputed with the norm procedure (Schafer and Graham 2002). Openness to experience and Extraversion have been measured with Big Five Inventory Model, originally developed by John and Srivastava (1999) and validated using 5-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Brand Passion has been measured with statements taken from Sternberg's Triangular love scale (1997), which have been adapted to the product context. The Brand Evangelism scale is partly based on Ahuvia (2006) and adapted to the more extreme brand enthusiasts' language and emotional intensity. Furthermore, according to Schouten and McAlexander (1995), I additionally adapted the scale with regard to the missionary attitude of brand passionate individuals and their engagement in recruiting.

2.2 Results

The proposed relationships among the constructs have been tested using structural equation modelling with SPSS AMOS 6.0. Items with low reliability (< 0.4) have been removed. As a result of the scale purification, openness has been measured with six items, extraversion with five items, brand passion with six items, and brand evangelism with five items. Figure 26 shows the measurement model.

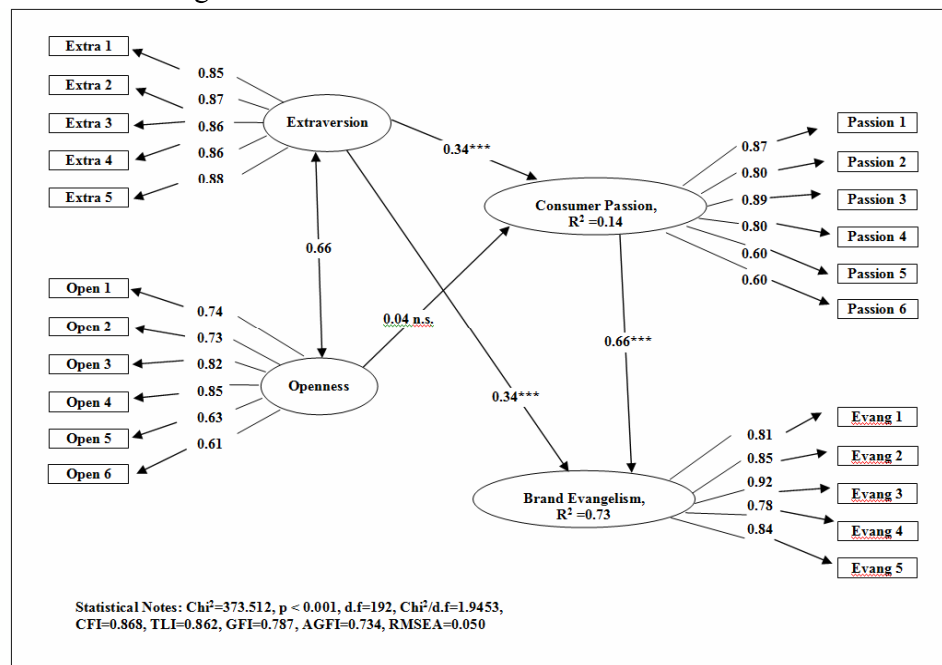


Figure 26 Statistical Relationships between Extraversion, Openness, Consumer Passion and Brand Evangelism

2.3 Model Fit

The chi-square value is 373.512 (d.f. = 192, $p = 0.000$; $\chi^2/\text{d.f.} = 1.9453$). Chi-square, however, is only recommended with moderate samples (Hu and Bentler 1999), e.g., 100 to 200 (Tabachnik and Fidell 1996), as with larger sample sizes as in this case, trivial differences become significant. Hence, other global fit indices are used to test model fit which show very good model fit. The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is 0.050, the goodness-of-fit index (GFI) is 0.787, the adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) is 0.734, the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) is 0.862 and the comparative fit index (CFI) is 0.868. Thus, it can be concluded that the model fit is satisfactory.

2.4 Reliability and Validity

Table 44 reports the local fit indices. Indicator loadings, composite reliability, average variance extracted and the Fornell-Larcker Ratio (Fornell and Larcker 1981) indicate satisfactory psychometric properties of the scales. The composite reliability is above the critical threshold of 0.6 for each construct, the average variance extracted exceeds the value of 0.50 in any case and the Fornell-Larcker Ratio is below 1, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity.

Table 44 *Psychometric Properties of the Scales*

Construct/ Property	Selected Item	Indicator Reliabilities	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted	Fornell- Larcker Ratio
Openness	I see Myself as someone who				
	1. Is original, comes up with new ideas	0.55	0.87	0.53	0.82
	2. Values artistic, aesthetic experiences	0.53			
	3. Has an active imagination	0.67			
	4. Likes to reflect, play with ideas	0.72			
	5. Is Ingenious, a deep thinker	0.39			
	6. Is inventive	0.37			
Extraversion	I see Myself as someone who				
	1. Is outgoing, sociable	0.72	0.94	0.75	0.58
	2. Talkative	0.77			
	3. Is full of energy	0.75			
	4. Generates a lot of enthusiasm	0.74			
	5. Has an assertive personality	0.77			
Consumer Passion	There is nothing as important as my brand	0.76	0.93	0.69	0.91
	1. I find myself thinking about my brand only	0.64			
	2. I would rather spend time with my brand than with anything else.	0.79			
	3. My relationship with my brand is passionate	0.64			
	4. Just seeing my brand is exciting to me	0.63			
	5. I cannot pass by my brand without touching it	0.64			

Construct/ Property	Selected Item	Indicator Reliabilities	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted	Fornell- Larcker Ratio
Brand Evangelism	1. Would make a perfect brand salesperson	0.60	0.92	0.70	0.89
	2. I have proselytized several of my friends to my brand	0.70			
	3. I try to convince as many as possible of my brand	0.84			
	4. I feel the need to tell the world that my brand is the most appealing brand of the world	0.73			
	5. If someone tries to decry my brand, I will tell him off unmistakably	0.66			

2.5 Regression Paths

Figure 26 displays the results of the analysis. Hypothesis one predicts a positive relationship between brand passion and brand evangelism and is strongly supported by the data ($\beta = 0.67$, $p = 0.000$). Extraversion ($\beta = 0.34$, $p = 0.000$) positively influences brand passion, whereas there is no significant relationship between Openness ($\beta = 0.04$, n.s.) and passion ($R^2 = 0.14$). Hence, hypothesis two is strongly supported but hypothesis three had to be rejected. Extraversion also positively influences brand evangelism ($\beta = 0.34$, $p = 0.000$), supporting hypothesis four.

3. CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

Passionate consumers evangelize. However, passion is not inherent in the object (Belk et al. 2003) but rather a function of many influencing factors, among which is a consumer's personality. The findings contribute to this contention and have interesting implications for marketers and marketing theory. First, we can support the view that extravert consumers are the most important and effective brand advocates when they feel passionate about a brand. Although loyalty might be expressed in various forms, brand advocacy additionally bears the advantage of credibility and the potential of building strong brand communities. However, as reported by Rozanski et al. (1999), passionate consumers might also be the most passionate opponents when they are disappointed by the brand that we need to understand perfectly. Hence, as Fournier (1998) has suggested, marketers must engage in active relationships with passionate consumers and regularly interact in an adequate and authentic way will surely lead to a mutually beneficial relationship in long run. Second, our findings show that, although extraversion and openness as personality traits are strongly interconnected, openness to experience nevertheless shows no significant effect on consumer passion. Although openness to experience is a highly emotional facet of personality, open personalities seem to refrain from being passionate consumers. We can assume that other, more aesthetic and luxury

consumption contexts could reveal a positive relationship between openness and consumer passion. Hence, more research is needed in different, more luxurious, intellectually stimulating, and aesthetic consumption contexts. Another interesting finding is that extravert consumers, in general, seem to engage more in evangelizing than others. This finding confirms the genuinely talkative character of extravert individuals. Hence, even if an extravert is not passionate, she/he will still engage in word-of-mouth communication. From that we can conclude that extravert consumers are important advocates for any brand. Hence, marketers should spend careful attention to extravert consumers, particularly as they might also be talkative brand opponents.

4. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH IMPERATIVES

Notwithstanding these important findings, we must also be cautious with regard to generalizations because the study has been conducted in only two cities of the country. Consumer of branded apparels especially of Levi's might be a very peculiar group of young people. Hence, our sample might represent a very specific target group of branded apparel buyers. Other brands of same commodity or different commodity can give varied results in terms of research as well as implications. Like different "objects of love" might attract different personalities and thus result in quite distinct behaviours. Further-more, culture and nationality in general might also make a difference with regard to enthusiast's behaviour. Observing and comparing the behavioural patterns of different countries for instance, can reveal that there can be different possible outcomes of consumer passion. Further research is also needed with regard to the community aspects and the many social factors that influence individuals' passionate feelings and behaviours with regard to brands. Evangelism is by far not the only outcome of brand enthusiasm. Yet, there might be other objects, for which people might not want to publicly expose their passion. The object in question might be a guilty pleasure; or the passionate feelings might be unwanted or even conflicting with other interests. There is also a lack of insight into the very private facet of consumer passion. As extraverts are likely to evangelize, more introvert individuals might be more likely to worship a brand in a very private manner. Furthermore, future research is needed with regard to individuals who score high on openness to experience in particular. Due to their intellectual aspiration, they might be more passionate about very different objects, like for instance music or artwork or any other commodity. To conclude, we can maintain that there is still much room for further theorizing and research on consumer personality and passion with regard to consumption objects and patterns.

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